

## **Mawlana Shaykh al-Islam Mufti Sayyad Ahmad Zayni Dahlan al-Makki'i ash-Shafi'i [d. 1304 AH / 1886 CE ] *'alayhir ar-rahman w'al ridwan***

In Makka and Madina there were the “great scholars of the age”, most notably the theologists and jurists of the different law-schools. These would teach in the Haram mosque (that is, the Great Mosque of the Ka'aba) and in the Masjid al-Nabawi (Prophet's) mosque in Madina according to fixed schedules. Among these, by far the most influential was Shaykh al-Islam Sayyad Ahmad Zayni Dahlan (*Allah be pleased with him*). Mawlana Shaykh Ahmad Zayni Dahlan was a renowned historian

and a scholar in the Islamic *fiqh*. He acquired different types of Islamic knowledge and was appointed as the Mufti of the Shafi'iyyah scholars in the greatly honoured city of Makkah. His students were so many, to the extent that it is rare to find a scholar who came after him whose chains of narrations do not include him. His teachers include Shaykh Uthman al-Dimyati and Shaykh 'Abdullah Siraj (*Allah be pleased with them*). Aside from his writings ( on *fiqh* and history) his major contribution to the *madhhab* came in the form of his numerous students, many of whom rose to become excellent *fuqaha*. Amongst them are Ahmad Rida Khan al Barelwi, Muhammad Sa'id BaBusayl, 'Alawi ibn Ahmad al-Saqqaf, Abu Bakr Shatta, 'Umar BaJunayd, and Husayn ibn Muhammad al-Hibshi (*Allah be pleased with them all*). In his time the first printing press was established in Makkah, and a number of his works came to be printed. He authored many writings which were published and widely spread. The following are some of his works:

- 1- *Sharhu Matn-il-Alfiyyah*; (an explanation of the text of *al-Alfiyyah* in the Arabic language)
- 2- *Tarikh-ud-Duwal-il-Islamiyyah bil-Jadawil-il Mardiyyah*; (a

history of the Islamic states)

3- *Fath-ul-Jawad-il-Mannan 'alal-'Aqidat-il-Musammati bi Fayd-ir-Rahman fi Tajwid-il-Qur'an*; (a summary of the tajwid rules of recitation of the Qur'an)

4- *Khulasat-ul-Kalam fi Umara'-il-Balad-il-Haram*; (the history of the rulers of Makkah)

5- *Al-Futuhāt-ul-Islamiyyah*; (a history of the opening of the different countries by Muslims)

6- *Tanbih-ul-Ghafilin, Mukhtasaru Minhaj-il-'Abidin*; (a summary exposing the good manners of the worshippers)

7- *Ad-Durar-us-Saniyyah fir-Raddi 'alal-Wahhabiyyah*; (a treatise refuting the Wahhabiys)

8- *Sharh-ul-Ajurrummiyyah*; (an explanation of an Arabic grammar text)

9- *Fitnat-ul-Wahhabiyyah*; [this booklet] (a treatise of the tribulations inflicted by the Wahhabiyyah sect).

The reputation of Shaykh Ahmad Zayni Dahlan grew and he became sought after by the seekers of knowledge particularly so in the Indian Ocean. Indeed, Dahlan's connection with the Indian Ocean world was close and multi-faceted, and his impact on East African Sufi practices and Islamic scholarship was to be long-standing. Firstly, he himself studied with a number of Hadrami Alawis, many of whom had family branches in East Africa as well as in the wider Indian Ocean. Then, he became a teacher for new generations of *ulama* from Indian Ocean lands – both Alawi and non-Alawi. Dahlan's theological outlook was very much in line with the reformed Sufis (of which the Alawis were important proponents even in the early 19th century). In his treatise against Wahhabi influence, Dahlan clearly views Sufism as a legal and integral part of Islamic practice – including such aspects as the visitation of tombs. From Dahlan's perspective, these practices fulfill – rather than transgress – the *Sharia*. He views grave-visitation or the recitation of *dhikr* as devotional acts, rather than ones with magical-mystical

overtones. At the same time, Dahlan also accepted the call for *ijtihad* (reinterpretation) and clearly claimed the right to reinterpret the revelation. His was, in other words, a "middle position". This view was shared by Dahlan's "second-in-command" Muhammad Said Bab-Sayl (d. 1912), a scholar of Hadrami origin. Like his mentor, Muhammad Said Bab-Sayl wrote a treatise in defence of Sufi practices. Shaykh Sayyad Ahmad Zayni Dahlan died in al-Madinah in Muharram of 1304 A.H.